

BULLETIN

THE ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LOCAL SOCIETIES COMMITTEE

40 EGLINTON AVENUE EAST
TORONTO 12 ONTARIO

No. 1

Autumn, 1968

This is the first issue of the Bulletin. Its creation is a direct result of the answers to the questionnaires, in which so many people asked for news of each others' doings. Ontario History was never intended to be a vehicle for local news so it was decided to start a twice-yearly Bulletin in which Local Historical Societies could exchange news and views. This is not a new venture. In 1944, Dr. J. J. Talman, who was Acting Secretary of The Ontario Historical Society at that time, edited a quarterly News Letter with the stated purpose, "to inform members and friends of the activities of the Society and of the local Historical Societies throughout the Province". To implement such a purpose is a tremendous task, indeed, for any one person to undertake. Thus the Editor of this Bulletin will necessarily have to rely on the Officers of the Local Societies for the bulk of the material to be used. Unless the news is sent in, this effort, which begins so hopefully, will die a natural death of attrition.

This first issue is being sent to all Historical Societies of which we have any record. If your Society is a member of The Ontario Historical Society, you will receive all the following Bulletins, and your co-operation in sending in news of your activities is earnestly solicited. If you are NOT a member of The Ontario Historical Society, this first Bulletin is the only one you will receive.

First Regional Workshop

The first Regional Workshop for local Historical Societies of the St. Lawrence Valley and area will be held at Queen's University on November 16th. The Ontario Historical Society is cooperating with the Queen's University Archives Department, who will sponsor this Workshop. Members of the Queen's Archives and Special Collections Departments, the Regional Library Service, and the Ontario Historical Society will lead a discussion about research materials and local history programs. To facilitate general discussion, registration is being limited and delegates are being urged to come prepared to take part in planning the formation of a Regional Council of Historical Societies, in this area.

History Repeats Itself

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the two following items. From The O.H.S. News Letter of October, 1944, - "A survey has been made of the McFarlane House on the Niagara River for the Niagara Parks Board which has acquired the property. The brick with which the house was built was cut and burned on the property in the year 1800. Members of The Ontario Historical Society may know of earlier brick houses not now extant, but it is likely that this is the oldest brick house in Ontario."

From the Toronto Globe and Mail for October 5, 1968, - "The Ontario Heritage Foundation has acquired its first historic building, - an Eighteenth Century home near Niagara-on-the-Lake, that is one of the oldest brick houses in the Province. The two-story home was built about 1795 by Col. Gilbert Field, a United Empire Loyalist whose family left Pennsylvania in the early 1780's. Known locally as the Field House, it is on the Niagara Parkway near Queenston. By some accounts, the Field House was used by Sir Isaac Brock as a headquarters in the War of 1812, and survived bombardments by U. S. batteries from across the Niagara River. It was bought seven years ago and restored by the Cudneys of London, Ont."

In the intervening twenty-four years, the MacFarlane House has been set up and is operating as a Historic House. The Field House is the newest project of The Ontario Heritage Foundation which has been recently formed to preserve the architectural history of our Province.

Binder Twine Festival

On Saturday, September 7th, the village of Kleinburg went all out to give their visitors a good time at the second annual Binder Twine Festival. This is a revival of a turn-of-the-century party held each Autumn by Shaw's Hardware Store, when the fall supply of binder twine came in. This 1968 version was a great success. The Main Street was blocked off at noon and a varied program of contests, folk dances, parades, and antique shows, etc., etc., went on all afternoon. The horseshoe pitching contest for the Pierre Berton Trophy attracted a large audience. At 3.30, a Plaque, honouring the Rev. Edwin Arthur Pearson, father of Canada's former Prime Minister, the Hon. Lester Pearson, was unveiled by his great grandchildren. All the booths at the Festival were manned by villagers and the proceeds will be used to maintain the rural atmosphere of Kleinburg, and to aid its youth activities.

Macpherson House Opening

The Lennox and Addington Historical Society held the official opening of its Allan Macpherson House on August 3rd. Due to the Postal Strike, we did not receive our invitations until August 9th, and so, regrettably, there were no representatives from The Ontario Historical Society present. The Macpherson House is a handsome building situated on a beautiful river-side lot in the town of Napanee. The Board of Management of the House has encouraged visitors during the period of restoration, and it has been most interesting and rewarding to watch the development of this project. The actual restoration has been under way for some time, and the Lennox and Addington Historical Society are to be congratulated for their tenacity of purpose.

Patent Medicine

One of the most interesting monthly publications to come into our office is the Wisconsin "Then and Now". The July issue has an article on Patent Medicines of the early 1900's - a business estimated to have been worth some seventy-five million dollars by 1905. Most of us will remember Sarsaparilla and Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, but how many are acquainted with Draper's Elixir

Celery Compound? It was purported to be "useful in mental fatigue, dysomania, senility, morphine habit, languor and nervous debility." Its ingredients were mainly celery, cocoa and cola, and it sold for fifty cents a bottle.

Peterborough Historical Society

We offer congratulations to the Peterborough Historical Society for its bright, newsy "Bulletin". The October issue contains a notice of the next meeting; a description of several new acquisitions at Centennial Museum, and an account of the first Folk Festival at Century Village. A highlight was the school essay, written about the turn of the century by a young Peterborough student, entitled "Pioneer Days in Peterborough".

We particularly liked the idea behind the September meeting of the Society. Members gathered in the auditorium of the Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School. Four members of the History Department gave a preview of this year's Grade 10 classroom presentation of the topic "Fortifications on the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario". Using maps, charts, slides, a dual-screen technique and a background of martial band music, the Head of the History Department explained the new approach to history teaching which is being applied to a variety of topics in the Canadian History course at Peterborough this year.

A Suggestion

Does your historical Society sponsor tours? A bus tour is a very good way to keep up interest in your Society during slack seasons and to attract new members. Granted that you need someone who is a good organizer to take charge of the trip, but a half-day or even a whole-day trip requires little in the way of capital to start with. Ontario is rich in places to go, - pioneer villages where one needs a whole day to see it all, - or perhaps just a scenic drive to spend a worthwhile hour at one of Ontario's many excellent small museums. A Mystery Trip with an unknown destination is intriguing. Even a drive through the country to visit a neighbouring Society and spend a couple of hours over tea and conversation pays dividends in awakening new interest and gaining new members.

Sault Ste. Marie and 49th Field Reg't R.C.A. Historical Society Activities

This young and active Historical Society has just sent us an outline of its activities for 1968. Meetings are held every third Thursday, except in July, August and December to hear papers on subjects of historical interest. In June, the Society visited the Garden River Indian Reserve where members viewed the graveyard and heard a talk on the religious and spiritual beliefs of the Indians. In August, they went to Mackinac Island. Here they toured the island by horse and carriage, and visited the main fort, the museum and several old habitations. A trip to the shores of Lake Superior to see the Indian pictographs is being planned. In addition to all this, the Society is working on the restoration of the Ermatinger House (1814 - 1822) which it is hoped will come as nearly to the original furnishing as possible.

York Pioneer and Historical Society Walk

On October 5th, the York Pioneer and Historical Society held the latest of its walking tours in the town of Bradford. In spite of rather chilly weather, a group of about sixty people gathered at the Public Library. Mr. B. Napier Simpson, Jr., who has made such a success of previous tours, led the group away from the Main Street to visit a number of interesting old houses and churches. A brief pause was made at each one and Mr. Simpson explained why he had chosen that particular building, and outlined the important features to look for. The co-operation of the townspeople in allowing the group to go into their homes made the tour much more interesting and gave the "walkers" a feeling of welcome and personal involvement in the cause of historic preservation. As a finale, members of the group drove in a motorcade through the Scotch Settlement to the Presbyterian Church, where the incumbent Minister greeted them, and the Ladies of the Church served a very welcome cup of tea.

Grey County Historical Society

The Grey County Historical Society sponsored the unveiling and dedication of an Historical Plaque commemorating the loss of the "Jane Miller" in Sauble Valley Conservation Park on October 26th. The "Jane Miller" was a wooden-hulled freight and passenger vessel built at Little Current in 1879. She was owned by her Skipper, Andrew Port, of Wiarton. On November 25, 1881, at Owen Sound and Meaford, she loaded a heavy deck cargo destined for Manitoulin Island. Not obtaining enough wood at Big Bay dock (North Keppel) to reach his destination, Captain Port attempted to reach Spencer's Landing, but the ship was capsized by gale-force winds almost within sight of it. Some 30 aboard, including her crew of nine, were lost in one of Georgian Bay's worst marine disasters.

The speaker of the afternoon was Rev. J. F. McCaffrey, S.J. (Midland) of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario, and the unveiling was done by Mr. W. G. Cheshire of Wiarton.

Notes

Affiliated Societies are reminded that they should send a copy of the Annual Report to The Ontario Historical Society office. Some Societies do this every year as a matter of course, but there are many more who do not. It is difficult, if not impossible, to keep track of all the changes in the Officers and their addresses for the local Societies unless someone sends them in.

The York Pioneer and Historical Society sends a copy of its Annual Report, "The York Pioneer" to every affiliated Society. At a recent Executive Meeting, it was noted that only about one-third of the Societies to which the magazine was sent, ever acknowledged receiving it. This is discouraging, particularly in view of the fact that so many of the questionnaires asked for news of the activities of other Societies.

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SUMMARY OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

MEMBERSHIP

6 gave no answer
1 museum lists "about 1000 donors"
7 have over 300
 York Pioneers 460
 Kingston H. S. 428
 Toronto U.E.L. 376
 Waterloo 375
 Oakville 352
 Ottawa 344
 Penn. German 300
1 has over 200
15 have 100-200
11 have 50-90
13 have under 50

MEETINGS

6 have 1 a year
17 have 5 or less
23 have 6 to 9
6 have 10
2 have 12

PUBLICATIONS

U.E.L. has central publication for all branches
3 issue newsletters
5 published a pamphlet in 1967
1 publishes every two years
8 publish yearly and have been for two to 16 years

MUSEUMS

36 groups have, or are associated with museums

Nine groups have neither publications nor museums but they have five to nine meetings a year and one also has a special trip each year.

Only seven groups have both museums and yearly publications and one of these also provides a newsletter.